

Soldiers *Online*



Among CEPOD's many projects in the Pacific is a telescope facility atop Maui's dormant Haleakala volcano.

PACIFIC



ENGINEERS

Story and Photos by Heike Hasenauer

HONOLULU District engineer LTC Wally Walters had just returned from American Samoa, where one of his engineers was coordinating construction of small-boat harbors to facilitate transportation of life-sustaining goods to and from remote locations.

“People don’t realize the scope of our geographic location, the cultural differences we encounter and the diversity of our projects,” Walters said.

Headquartered at Fort Shafter, Hawaii, the Corps of Engineers’ Pacific Ocean Division — to which the Honolulu District belongs — is responsible for an area spanning more than a third of the earth’s surface, Walters said. That’s the largest geographic area of any of the Corps’ eight divisions and 40 districts and field operating agencies worldwide.

“All that the Corps does in terms of civil works and military design and construction is represented in our program in Hawaii,” he said. While most of it focuses on military construction, more than \$300 million of the district’s budget since 1902 has been spent on Pacific Island infrastructure.

CEPOD’s other district offices include those in Alaska, Korea and Japan. The former has participated in projects such as ecosystem protection following 1989 *Exxon Valdez* oil spill, and preservation of Alaska’s wetlands,

said CEPOD spokesman Larry Hawthorne.

CEPOD engineers also provide assistance following natural disasters. Cleanup efforts on the Hawaiian island of Kauai following Hurricane Iniki in 1992, for example, lasted a year and a half, Hawthorne said.

The Honolulu District, established in 1905, has made “phenomenal” contributions to the United States and its military forces, Hawthorne said.

Its role began in 1904 when LT John Slattery traveled from San Francisco, then the site of Pacific Division headquarters, to Oahu, to supervise the building of lighthouses and coastal artillery emplacements, and the expansion of Honolulu Harbor, Walters said.

When a permanent Honolulu District was established in 1905, Slattery acquired 74 acres of what was then a “mostly swampy and usually flooded area of duck ponds,” Hawthorne said. Today that land is among the world’s choicest real estate on Waikiki beach, site of the Armed Forces Recreation Center’s Hale Koa Hotel.

In the 1920s and ’30s the division’s engineers worked on beach-erosion projects and built military installations. In 1941 some 25,000 Corps employees completed a chain of nine island airfields along routes from California, through Hawaii, Australia and the Philippines in just 90 days, Hawthorne said. And

within three months after the Dec. 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Corps employees in Honolulu worked on 1,400 projects in Hawaii valued at \$84 million.

After the war the district built the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, known as the “Punchbowl,” and the largest military hospital in the Pacific, Tripler Army Medical Center.



CEPOD contractors use metal detectors to locate unexploded ordnance at Bellows Air Force Station on Oahu. The ordnance is then rendered safe and removed.

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The district was also responsible for military construction in support of the Korean and Vietnam conflicts, Hawthorne said.

Later, the Honolulu District completed construction of a chemical weapons disposal plant on remote Johnston Atoll and a \$20 million telescope facility for the Air Force atop Haleakala, Maui's 10,000-foot dormant volcano.

Today, the massive telescope is the Air Force's premier optical surveillance system, allowing the service to track and map all of the roughly 8,000 man-made objects hurled into earth orbit over the last 45 years, Hawthorne said.

Among other Corps projects is flood control, as on the island of



The Whole Barracks Renewal Project — a \$1 billion effort over 10 years — is providing new barracks and other facilities for the Hawaii-based 25th Infantry Division.

Hawaii, where nearly a dozen major floods have struck the business district of Hilo, its largest city, since 1920, Hawthorne said.

On Oahu, home of the 25th Infantry Division, the district is focused on the 13-year, \$1 billion Whole Barracks Renewal Program. Begun in 1995 to bring barracks up to the Army's one-plus-one standard, the project is due to be completed in 2008,

said program manager Ray Kishaba.

Three barracks buildings that collectively house 500 soldiers were completed in 1998. In April 2000, the doors

opened to a new dining facility for the 25th Inf. Div.'s 2nd Brigade.

Another barracks is to be completed by December, and beginning in 2003 the Corps will renovate 16 barracks for the 25th ID's Division Support Command and 125th Military Intelligence Brigade, Hawthorne said.

It's no mean feat, considering that engineers must protect not only the building facades of those listed as



CEPOD played an important role in the planning and construction of the renowned Hale Koa Hotel on Waikiki — a Hawaiian haven for service members, their families, retirees and eligible federal employees.

historic sites, but the environment as well. The Honolulu District is responsible for protecting 25 percent of America's endangered plants and wildlife, Hawthorne said.

Environmental work includes the cleanup of former defense sites, such as the ocean-front property recently restored at Bellows Air Force Station on Oahu, and other sites on the islands of Hawaii, Molokai and Guam, Walters said.

The station, an important Nike-Hercules anti-aircraft missile site until 1971, was littered with unexploded ordnance, he said. Some of it was the result of recent training, Hawthorne said, but other litter included ordnance and training devices dating back to World War II. Weeks after the project began, a team of 35 people uncovered about 6,000 pounds of live ammunition.

When the Nike site was closed in 1971, the land was used for various purposes, among them an urban assault training area and track for jeep rallies and motorcycle races, said Corps project manager Jerry Cornell.

"We removed some 22 tons of junk — 106 pickup-truck loads — from the area," he said. Workers completed the \$2.3 million cleanup project in June, and the land has been returned to the state of Hawaii, which will establish a national park and recreation area there, Hawthorne said.

At the same time the Corps provides land for recreation, it secures and protects the Army's valuable training land. Recently, CEPOD bought the Kahuku Training Area used by soldiers of the 25th Inf. Div.

Creating change that will help communities thrive and prosper at the same time they're being protected — and improving the Defense Department's view of the universe, too — are among CEPOD's broad range of missions in the unique environments of the Pacific Islands. □



Three barracks buildings that collectively house 500 25th Infantry Division soldiers were completed in 1998 as part of the Whole Barracks Renewal Program.



A comprehensive CEPOD flood-control program in Hilo, Hawaii, has saved homes and businesses from repeated floodings.